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ABSTRACT

The stories in this collection result from a class activity in an English-as-a-Second-Language course at Prague Institute of Chemical Technology (Czechoslovakia). The students, most in their third or fourth year of postsecondary education, had all studied English previously but primarily as an academic exercise, and had had little contact with native speakers of English. Students were asked to share personal stories or anecdotes of their own experiences. Triggers used to stimulate student writing included snapshots and sketches and ideas from a text on lifestory writing. The stories included here are a sampling of the classroom activities' results. Teachers are encouraged to look at the stories as examples of language learner communication, despite idiomatic and syntactic flaws. Language specialists are urged to examine unusual English usage and evidence of interference. (MSE)

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Stories from Prague

Lifestorying by Students

at the Prague Institute of Chemical Technology

Sydney Butler and
Anita Jana Butler

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STORIES FROM PRAGUE

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Oral and Written Lifestorying

by

Students at the Prague Institute of Chemical Technology

In the Process of Learning English

Collected and Printed

by

Sydney Butler and Anita Jana Butler

Vancouver, 1990.

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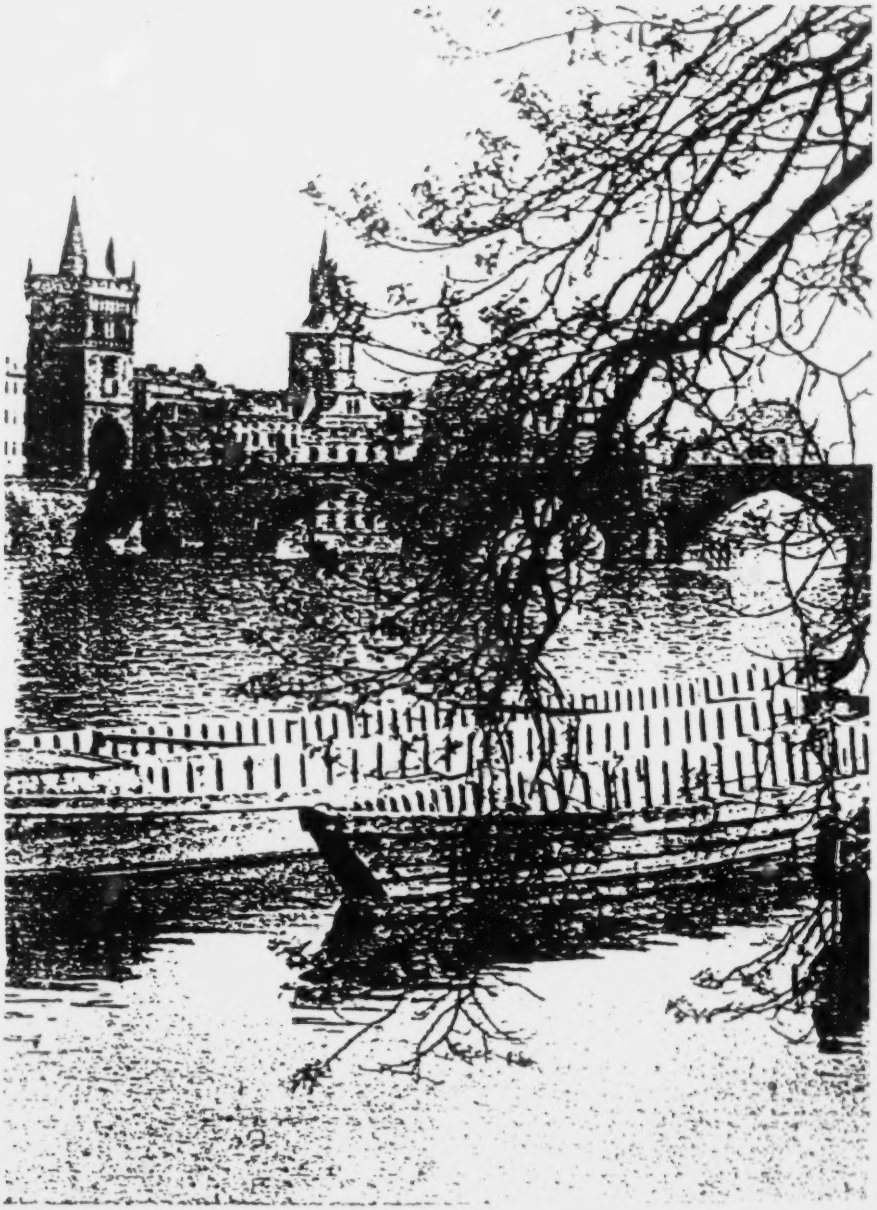

INTRODUCTION

The stories in this collection are the result of a class activity that we organized as a part of our courses in "English for Communication" at the Prague Institute of Chemical Technology in Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1990. The students, mainly in their third or fourth years of post-secondary education with a sprinkling of post-graduates, had all studied English previously, but mainly as an academic exercise using the grammar-translation method. Moreover, because of the previous political situation they had had little contact with native speakers of English and little experience of actually using the English language.

Following the "Velvet Revolution" of November, 1989, the Czech students, who had been a main force in the overthrow of the communist system, realized that as technologists and prospective citizens of a united Europe they would need to be able to speak English in order to be able to communicate with their colleagues and fellow students from the west. Even in the spring of 1990 it was obvious that English had effectively become the *lingua franca* of the new Europe. When students from such countries as Sweden, France, Spain, Holland, Austria, or Western Germany visited Prague, it was English that enabled them to communicate with each other in the "Mensa" student cafeterias. Not even the most chauvinistic Czech expected the visitors to speak the Czech or Slovak languages. Moreover, when students from the Prague Institute visited these countries for work experience as part of their technical training, they found that English was often the language of the workplace.

Consequently, the courses which we developed for these students focussed specifically on the uses of English for oral communication. Our classes were founded on the principle that the students had to use English to communicate, not only with us, but with each other. A typical class of ninety minutes was structured with a whole-class introductory activity led by the teacher, followed by group activities during which the students developed their own ideas, worked on compiling the needed vocabulary, and then carried on a dialogue with their colleagues in the group. Using this

type of class organization we taught introductions, interviews, panel discussions, dialogues, and various improvisational drama activities to develop the students' confidence and ability in expressing their own ideas.

An important principle in these communicative activities is the need for a "communication gap"--knowledge and information which only the speaker has, and which the listeners need to find out.

This principle became very apparent in our unit of "life-storying," when we asked students to share personal stories or anecdotes of their own experiences. For our first session in this unit, we asked the students to bring to class a snapshot or picture of something important in their lives. For those students who had no access to such photos, we prepared blank 10x15 cm. pieces of paper, explained the concept of "Do-It-Yourself," and asked them to draw a sketch of a meaningful scene or situation. We then allowed all the students time to develop a "key vocabulary," listing the words and idioms which they would need to tell the story, while we circulated, giving individual help as necessary. Then in their groups of five, the students took turns to show their snapshots or sketches, and tell their stories, while the listeners used "Where, Why, When, Who, What, Which" questions to clarify or extend the discourse.

The results of these life-storying episodes were very encouraging. The students became involved in their stories, being able to take control of the story-telling situation, and were keen to develop the necessary vocabulary and narrative structures. They gained confidence in being able to communicate their stories. But just as important, these stories enabled the students to appreciate each other at a more personal level.

For subsequent life-storying episodes we used some of the *"triggers"* described in the text by Roy Bentley and Syd Butler, *Lifewriting: Self-Exploration and Life Review Through Writing* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1988). Each of these activities was introduced as an experiment to see if anyone could remember a life-story from the particular "door into experience." In this way we took our students through "The Sense of Place," "The Memory of a Childhood Incident," "A Time of Danger," and "First Experiences." Examples of the students' stories resulting from these triggers can be found in the following collection.

The stories in this collection are not intended to be a complete, comprehensive record of the activity, nor even a representative sample. The written versions, in fact, came only as an afterthought when we offered the

students the opportunity to submit in writing the stories they had already told orally. Some of the students used our offer as a means of having us check the correctness of their language; others were intrigued by the possibility of having their stories "published" as a proof of their achievement in English. Not all of the students submitted their stories and signed the authorization-to-publish release form. Yet the reader will find that this miscellany of personal stories presents a fascinating collage of Czech student life, travel, memories, and interests.

The language teacher will also find these stories valuable as evidence of how the language learners were able to communicate their experiences in spite of some faults in English idiom and syntax. Throughout our courses we emphasized the aim of communication rather then correctness. There are, of course, some language errors in these texts. But we ask the reader to gloss over such blemishes, just as in our classes we refrained from interrupting the students to correct language errors. Only if such mistakes prevented the listeners from understanding the speaker did we intervene to help clarify meaning.

Language specialists will also be interested in some of the slightly unusual English usages which occur in these stories. Those familiar with the Czech language may be able to identify some signs of first language interference, as when one student, in writing our her mother's recipe for *bublanina* advised the reader to "bake in a moderate furnace."

So, in the same spirit of tolerance for language idioms we ask the reader to look beyond any surface errors in order to hear the genuine voice of the student-author, making allowance for someone who is still in the process of learning English, and yet someone who has a story to tell, and a story worth reading.

S.B. and A.J.B.

MY UNCONSCIOUS GOAL

Jaroslav Bejbl

I'll tell you about the danger about which I didn't know. Three years ago we played a soccer match. I was the striker. There was no score in the game, but ten minutes before the end I jumped at a ball to challenge with the goalie of our rivals. I was quicker than he and I headed the ball, and his hand struck my head. It was a knock out. I fell down in the grass and I lost consciousness.

The ambulance had to come for me and took me to hospital. I woke up after an hour in the hospital. I forgot nothing. But round about me there were many of our players, and my coach, and they all had fear in their eyes. And they told me that I scored the goal, and we won because of my goal.

A BET

Michal Pechar

If somebody asks me about my favourite animals, he can only get one answer. Horses. A horse at full gallop with a flying mane and tail is one of the most beautiful pictures I can imagine.

I like everything that is connected with these animals. And of course I like to visit horse-races. However, I can't do it very often because of my studies. But when I get there it's a really happy day for me. And I am not able to go to the races and not bet on horses. I know it can be dangerous, especially for somebody who doesn't know the horses very well. That is my case too. But anyway, I always have to risk it.

One Sunday I decided to once again visit the Prague race track in Velka Chuchle. The weather was wonderful and crowds of people were attracted by the exciting atmosphere of the races. The smell of the animals, the voices of people discussing their chances, and lots of money in bets. I think only a very cool man could stand the spirit without betting at least a few crowns on a horse. I couldn't either.

I know that I'm a greenhorn and, moreover, not very rich, as with most students. Therefore I usually bet on favourites with very low odds in case of winnings. I don't risk too much but I don't win too much either.

That Sunday I stood in front of a bookmaker's stand and I watched the odds of the horses starting in the following race on the monitor. There were two or three hot favourites and I couldn't decide on one of them. Suddenly I noticed two men quietly speaking about the chances of these horses.

"Which horse are you going to play? Virbius or Mauritius?" one asked. His friend answered: "Both are excellent, but Zotar is good too. I believe in him today."

After these words he came to the counter and said: "One hundred crowns on the four." I turned my eyes back to the screen and read the rates. Virbius and Mauritius are the greatest favourites, both with rates 2:1. Zotar had the rate 20:1; it meant he was last outsider.

If he doesn't win the man will lose one hundred crowns. But anyway, he seems to know what he's doing, I thought, and I turned to the counter too.

"Ten crowns on the four", I said.

"You can bet at least twenty, young man", came the reply .
"O.K., twenty on the four", I admitted, after a while of hesitating.

I put the ticket into my pocket and told myself: "I'm a fool. I have just lost eight glasses of beer."

I went back to the tribune with these sad thoughts in my head but also with a little piece of hope in my heart.

I carefully observed all the horses getting ready to start in the race. I tried to find the number four but I didn't succeed as I'd forgotten my field-glasses at home and the starting boxes were exactly on the opposite side of the track. I just had to listen to the commentary. Everything is ready. All the horses are in the boxes. Go! The race began.

"Zotar is in the lead, Virbius in second position ..." I heard the commentary. I didn't believe that Zotar could keep the first position all the time. One and a half miles is too long a distance.

The field of horses is turning to the final round. People are standing up in their seats. Thousands of voices are shrieking with all their might. The number four is still about a half a length ahead. Only very few people are shouting the name Zotar. The imagination of the lost bets is forcing the spectators to support the favourites. Virbius and Mauritius are trying to overtake Zotar in the last few meters. But in the end he is the unmistakable winner, by still about half a head.

When I took the four hundred crowns of my winnings, I decided not to bet any more that day. It was too risky. But I could only stand it for the next race. During the last three races that afternoon I lost two hundred crowns of my previous winnings.

AN ABANDONED DOG

Michaela Endrštová

Two years ago during the summer holidays I travelled with my friend, Dan, through south Bohemia. We spent the last five days not far from České Budějovice in the camp near the lake Mydlák.

It was very nice weather, so we were mostly by the water, and we swam. Later on in the afternoon we hiked throughout the neighbourhood. One day, when we returned from the wood, it was already dark. Dan entered the tent and found the flashlight, and suddenly he felt something hairy. He switched on the light, and we saw a little dog which was contentedly sleeping on our sleeping-bags.

The dog was about half a year old, black and white, of indefinite race. We woke him up but he kept on lying there, and he didn't want to leave. The tent was very small so we carried the dog out. After a while he went away and we fell asleep. In the morning, on awaking, we ascertained that the dog was our guest again. He was evidently abandoned, and so our tent became his new home.

We gave him the name Kryštof. During the day Kryštof ran about throughout the camp and played with the children. On a later day Krystof appeared in the afternoon already, when there was a sudden fall of rain. Our tent was old and wasn't able to keep out the rain. There was a single dry place in the middle of the tent, where all our things were accumulated. Kryštof especially enjoyed being in this place, and didn't want to leave it. He was very disobedient, and we had to forcibly remove him to his place in the corner.

After that we spent another two days with Kryštof. Then came the day when we had to roll up our tent and return home. Kryštof couldn't go with us; we had to part with him. And so we could only hope that Kryštof found not only a new home, but a new master too.

MY VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION

Tomáš Smolík

Last year in August I spent a month in Russia. My trip began at the Prague-Rusyně airport. I and my eight friends flew at 5 p.m. and we arrived in Moscow about two hours later. Past custom-control, we waited in the exit hall for somebody who would go with us to the college. Bu till ten p.m. During this time I and two friends went to the police where we asked the way to the Moscow Institute of Chemistry. This Institute was looking after us.

So, we travelled to the Institute, and we met with some woman -- she was head of the faculty -- and we said to her that we'd been waiting at Sheremetjevo airport and that we didn't know the way to the college .... To this she only answered "What?" and she very quickly ran to the taxi-station. It was twelve a.m. We travelled to the airport for the others. The driver said: "Everybody go here, please." And there were ten people with our luggage and the driver to one car. We departed from the airport at 1.30 a.m. In about half an hour we were at the college, at last. But it was not the end of surprises.

We got rooms on the twentieth floor. When I opened the door I saw a lot of animals which were running all over the place. The animals were cockroaches. I was very surprised. It was the first time I'd ever seen any. After a little while a friend came to me, he gave me a sterilization spray, and he invited me to tea. This day I got to sleep at three a.m. But this night I slept badly.

In the morning we met with our Russian friends. Both the two girls said that they'd waited for us at the railway station! To explain: We'd sent a telegram one week before our arrival, that we wouldn't be travelling by train, but we'd travel by plane. To this they answered that they hadn't received our telegram yet. The Communist post-office!

I spent three weeks in Moscow. I went to the Red Square, Gorky Street, and to many other places. In the shops I saw only empty shelves. We

had our meals in the students' dining-hall. The meals were mostly: first day -- mutton, second day -- mutton, third day -- mutton ....

Moscow -- city of contradictions. On the one hand clean and exhibiting Kremlin and Red Square, and on the other hand dirty streets on the outskirts of Moscow, dirty passages full of beggars... Some places little children begged also.

We spent the last week of August in Usbekistan in the central part of Asia. We travelled by plane to Taschkent, Usbekistan's capital. We departed from Domodedovo airport. We had to travel right through Moscow to get to this airport. When we came to the airport I was surprised. Domodedovo is the inland airport. In the airport hall there were whole families lying down and sitting about. There was a bad smell there. On the floor lay bottles, old papers .... We went to the space allocated for foreigners. This space was at the other end of the airport. There we waited to depart. We flew for four hours.

We arrived in Taschkent at five p.m. Taschkent's time (plus six hours to world time). We met there with our "guides" who had come to Taschkent the day before. They welcomed us with this news: "We don't know where you'll sleep today." That day we slept all in one room at the college. Nine people slept in a room for two. The weather was very warm into the bargain. At eight p.m. it was 40 degrees C in the shade. That night I didn't sleep again.

The next day everybody got a room. Taschkent is "small" with about 200,000 inhabitants. In central square there is the Koubeldash Madrasah from the sixteenth century. This is the only monument in Taschkent, because there was the big eartquake in Taschkent in 1966.

Some days later we travelled to Gamarland and Buchara. The first time we went to Buchara by train. We departed from Taschkent in the evening and we arrived in Buchara in the morning. Buchara is smaller than Taschkent, but it is better preserved. Buchara was founded in the ninth century and since then it's been the Mausoleum of the Samanides. Buchara, and also Samarland, is a city in the desert. But in spite of it, there is a lot of verdure in Buchara. In the evening we returned to the st ation and departed for Gamarkand. This train had a wagon which was only for foreigners. This wagon was clean and it had police-control. We got to Gamarkand at one a.m., but only I and my two friends alighted from the train. The others travelled to Taschkent. The others travelled to

Taschkent.

Because we didn't have seat reservation tickets we waited till six a.m. when the booking-office opened. But we didn't buy tickets because we had to go from the office to the station master, and from the station master to the office, and from the office .... Simple, we had many problems.

Gamarkand is still smaller than Buchara. The whole centre is Registan -- a square with colourful Mosques and madrasans.

In the afternoon we returned tio the station. We went to the booking office. "I haven't any tickets" the cashier said to us. My friend got a good idea. He produced from his pocket three chewing-gums. The cashier took it and said: "How many tickets do you want?" ..... It was very funny. But we didn't laugh for long. When we got onto the train we were unpleasantly surprised. No wagon for foreigners, but a normal wagon with hard beds. We travelled to Taschkent for twelve hours. On August 29th we returned to Prague.

This was a very instructive trip for me. I hadn't thought that the situation in the U.S.S.R. was that bad.

DANGER

Simona Červenková

I went with my colleagues to a pub near the school to have dinner after our final state examinations. On the way back to school, where there was a celebration of school-leaving, I was looking around and talking about my examination. I didn't see the tram. My friend caught my hand and stopped me. The tram only just missed me. Ten minutes later I was very scared when I realized what could have happened.

****

MY SKI DEBUT

Simona Červenková

I was one and a half years old when my father took me to the mountains to teach me skiing. I had my first wooden skis. I couldn't ski well because I was still in diapers. I made three steps and broke my ski. It was my first and only pair of skis I broke.

STORY OF DANGER

Michaela Kolomazníková

I have a sister, Pavla. She is nine years younger than me. When she was little I had to look after her. Once we went for a walk. My sister took her sand box with her. We came to the playground, and my sister began to make sand castles.

There were my friends at the playground. I talked with them for some time. Suddenly I turned around and my sister was gone. I began to look for her, but I could not find her. I cried, I thought somebody had taken her away, or she had fallen in the river. I was very scared and

unhappy. I asked some people, but nobody had seen her, nobody knew anything. I was afraid to return home. I thought my parents would beat me. I looked for her until 21 o'clock.

It was dark when I came home. I was very surprised because there was my sister asleep in her bed. My parents were very worried, not about Pavla, but about me. They were going to call the police to find me.

THE SUICIDE CLUB

Ivana Strnadlova

It happened two years ago at a hostel. I returned from a dance at about two a.m. My two friends slept so I went to bed too. When I was lying down I heard some sounds from our balcony. First I thought that I was dreaming, but then I knew that somebody was on our balcony, and that he was trying to open the balcony doors. I was very scared, but then I plucked up courage. I jumped up and I shut the door. Then I woke up my friends. I told them that somebody was on our balcony. I was lying down and shaking because of that incident. Lenka looked onto the balcony, and there was our friend, Vlastik. He left. But I couldn't sleep for a long time.

And now for the explanation. We were a group of about fifteen members, and we decided that we would play a game. This game was in accordance with a book "The Club of Suicides." This book talks about people who didn't want to live, and so they went to their club every month. There they drew the name of one who had to die and one who had to kill him. But nobody knew who was who.

We didn't actually want to kill ourselves. Our task was to think up an unusual "murder" and to kill our victim. The thing was that the victim didn't know that he had died. Some ways of "killing" were quite funny. Somebody, for instance, grew an inconspicuous flower that ate people, and he gave this flower to his victim to water. Or it could be just a wonderful flower with a poisonous smell. Or some poisons added to meat or drink, or some special guns, and so on. We met every week and a "killer" had to read his "murder" out to us.

As I said, some "murders" were really funny. But the abortive attempt on me wasn't sufficient for our game, and too much for my nerves. After this incident we thought it better to stop playing our game.

THE FALL

Ivana Strnadlová

It was a marvellous summer afternoon. The sun was shining, the sky was blue without any clouds. I was twelve and I was riding a nice black horse, Lady Salima, for the second time in my life. Somebody said that the most lovely view of the world is from the back of a horse. I agree with him. But this time I couldn't admire the beauty of the scenery. I think I was the seventh kid on Salima's back this day; she was tired and she didn't want to obey me.

I tried to lead her around the meadow, but my effort was useless. Salima did what she wanted, not what I wanted. She aimed at the jump hurdle, she stopped before it, and she stood still. I think she said to herself: "No more steps!"

But the chief of the riding club came by. He saw us and he decided that he'd see how much we knew. He clicked his tongue. Maybe Salima recognized the authority and she obeyed. It was only a moment. When Salima jumped up, my feet fell out of the stirrups, I found myself about half a meter above Salima's back, and then I fell down, fortunately into the saddle. At first I didn't know what had happened. Then I was very angry with the chief, because I could have fallen down. But then I felt very happy, that I had jumped over the hurdle, and my friend, Hanka, hadn't.

But my happiness didn't last a long time. While I was thinking about my success Salima got scared of something and she started to rear. I was down in a minute. Salima reared a little longer above me and then she started running over the meadow and everyone tried to catch her. I limped my way back to my friends and reflected that I wouldn't sit down for several days.

DANGER

René Endrst

One year ago I was in Altaj, a mountain in the U.S.S.R. We climbed to the peak of the mountain, but we didn't have a good map. One day we had to cross the saddle in the other valley. Because the map was bad, we climbed the wrong saddle. The descent from this saddle was very difficult, but we were lazy and we didn't have time to find a better way. We decided to climb down. We had only 80 metres of rope, and the rock that we had to climb down measured about 800 metres. Therefore we climbed most of the way without a rope. One bad step and we could have fallen down. There was a danger of falling stones too.

My friend, who climbed first, climbed on the glacier, but he didn't put on climbing irons. Suddenly he fell, began to glide down, and fell into a rift. He broke his hip and couldn't walk. We took two days to bring him down, and we looked for help. Three days later we had success. A helicopter took our friend to hospital.

****

WHEN I WAS A GREENHORN

René Endrst

My friend in western Czechoslovakia had a riding horse. When I was there two months ago he asked me if I would like to try horseback riding. I had never before ridden a horse, only a donkey. Therefore I wanted to try horseback riding.

I sat in the saddle, urged the horse on, but he very soon recognized that I was a greenhorn, and didn't want to obey me. He started to rear up, and tried to shake me off. We fought each other for about half an hour when he realized that he couldn't throw me off, and began to obey me. At first I rode at a trot, then also at a gallop.

I returned after a couple of hours, very happy, but for the next three days I couldn't sit down.

AN ADVENT STORY

Radek Zýka

At the beginning I was together with my friend John. John played bass guitar and I'm a drummer. We had similar ideas on how to arrange our music. We liked the so-called "gothic" style. ("Gothic" -- from English black novels of Walpole, Monk Lewis, etc.) Primary in music is the dark, thick atmosphere. We were searching for a good guitarist. We heard about a guitarist who wanted to play our kind of music from our friend Petr. We met Zdeněk and talked about our plans. Zdeněk was satisfied; we too. At first we wanted a singer with an alto voice, but she was not to be found.

Our first song came into being in May, 1989. In September, 1989, we entered a competition for lead vocal. John was the best. He heard the same music and had similar views. From September, 1989, we were working out a program for a concert. When the 17th November revolution happened, we had to abandon this work. Everyone wanted to do their part for the victory of the revolution, for this movement against the communist regime. I was on Wenceslas Square every day. Zdeněk was working on the strike committee.

Now we've been playing again from January, 1990. Now in May, 1990, we are waiting for some new instruments and we want to give our first public concert in June. We have fifteen songs ready. We compose our own music. Some of the words we're using are those by the Czech mystical poet, Otokar Březina. I think it's interesting that Otokar Březina was nominated for the Nobel Prize together with another Czech poet, Jaroslav Seifert.

As for the name of our band -- ADVENT -- it can be the time before Christmas, waiting for Jesus, or it can be waiting for a better time. We believe that this time is coming.

PRAGUE, 17TH NOVEMBER, 1989

Petr Kadlec

Six months ago I decided to take part in a student demonstration. My decision was based on the fact that it was the first action which was permitted by the officials and which wasn't organized by the Communist party. I didn't believe the demonstration would bring any political changes, but I hoped the great dissatisfaction of people and, above all, the young generation, would become apparent.

The demonstration was scheduled in the memory of Jan Opletal who was killed fifty years ago by German Nazis. However, to tell the truth, when I went to the demonstration I, as most of the people, didn't think of that murder. I believed the present-day problems would manifest themselves.

I was alone when I walked down the street to the destination, because my friends hadn't come. They didn't believe it had a chance. When I had got to the crowd of the demonstrating people, and when I heard the mottos which were being shouted, I realized my absent friends had made a mistake. It was a beautiful feeling for me to be able to shout whatever I wanted. Before that day I had been in the habit of only telling my actual opinions to my friends or relations. All the Czech people who didn't want to spend their lives in prison had to live this way. However, the fear was broken on the 17th November.

Firstly, somebody from the headquarters of The Union of Socialist Youth started his speech from the platform, but people started to whistle and his speech was over. Then many speakers spoke, but the greatest applause was for the man who spoke about solidarity with Chinese students who had been overpowered by the Communist army in the central Peking Square in 1989.

Then the crowd started to move, but we changed the scheduled way and went to the centre of Prague. The Police didn't want to let us go to the centre and we had to go in the original direction. Many people who saw us added themselves to the crowd. Many people were at their windows and shouted the mottos with us. I was afraid of the next police reaction, but they didn't intervene. They probably hoped that people would shout for a few minutes and then go home.

After three or four hours some speaker proposed to return to the centre. People applauded. When we had got near the Prague centre, police cars barred the road. Many thousands of people were surrounded between the police and the walls of the buildings. I wasn't afraid because I thought it impossible to repeat the Chinese events in the geographical heart of Europe. Then the police armoured cars arrived and started to push the crowd. After a few minutes of terrible pushing and shoving some soldiers with red berets appeared and began to beat the people. The Communist regime had used an anti-terrorist commando against unarmed people.

I was lucky because I managed to get away with only some bruises. After my escape I walked to the Prague centre, which was full of police, and at that time I realized that the Communist system was at an end. However, I didn't believe the future political changes would come without violence, and I still can't understand it today.

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MY FIRST DANCE

Martin Míka

My funny memory is about my first dancing lesson. It was in September, 1982 in the Rádiopalác at the Vinohradská street. As I remember it, it was very hot weather, and I felt nervous because I was wearing a dark suit, and it was very unusual for me.

There were about fifty boys and thirty girls. So at the beginning of the lesson, we stampeded to get the nice girls, but unfortunately the floor was polished, and many of us fell down. It was a very funny beginning.

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE OF POLITICS

Petr Kadlec

When I was about six years old I had my first experience of politics. I attended the first year of elementary school in Prague. We had two lessons of painting weekly.

However, we didn't paint pictures which are usually painted by children. We had only two topics: the Soviet Revolution in 1917, or the end of World War II, when the Soviet Army overpowered the Nazis in Prague.

I didn't know anything about it, and the teacher had to explain to us what to paint. If we wanted to paint the end of the war, we painted the tanks with a great red star. If we decided on the picture of the Soviet Revolution, we painted the battleship AURORA, which was used during the revolution.

I was six years old and the idea of painting battleships and tanks was attractive for me. I was too little; thus I didn't realize that this was politics.

THE FIRST TIME ON MY OWN IN A STRANGE COUNTRY

Thomas Franke

Three years ago, when I was seventeen, I travelled, hitch-hiking, via Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, to Bulgaria. After a week or some days more of a few nice adventures, I came to Sofia, the capital of this country.

But here I noticed that I had lost the address of the pen friend I wanted to meet. I remembered only the quarter where he lived. When I got there I saw a lot of large and high new blocks of flats. I tried to find his name on a mail-box, perhaps, but a lot of them were destroyed or unnamed. I said to myself it was no use searching for his name on the doors -- it would have taken at least two days -- but I didn't want to sleep yet another night in my sleeping-bag in the street -- in the middle of Sofia, perhaps fifty metres away from my friend. And, it was getting dark and cold too.

So I hopelessly began to ask some people in the street. "Excuse me, do you know perhaps an Igor Annfriev, a boy the same age as me? He must live in one of these blocks". It was funny, I had to try in German, in my bad English, my worse Russian, my still worse French, and even by using my hands and feet. And you have to know, in Bulgaria they have anohter system of body language: when they nod their head it means "no" and if you want to say "yes" you have to shake your head.

But I found good fortune; the fifth person I asked, a boy of my age, cried, after some explaining: "Igor Igorek? Yes, I know him, he's a class friend, come with me!" It was lucky that I hadn't tried to look for his name on the doors; they only had a number on their flat. But the family wasn't home. So I slept this night at Igor's friend's. The next day we got to know that the family was at the Black Sea about three hundred kilometres away, but where, the neighbours didn't know.

But all the same they were wonderful holidays, I got to know a lot of new friends, we spent the whole days on the streets and in historical places in this old city, and in the evenings we went to the cinema, or we stole a melon. Bulgarians of all ages sat in the parks of Sofia till eleven p.m. and talked. And after a week we all, a group of eight people, went out to the Black Sea. Last summer I saw Igor for the first time.

VISIT TO RUSSIA

Petr Pavlík

It was about three or four years ago, at the time when I first visited Russia. We worked in a kolkhos (a collective farm) which was situated in the heart of Siberia, somewhere near the Bajkal Lake. The Tajga started on the edge of the village, and it spread for hundreds of kilometres as far as Mongolia's border.

One day we were invited by the Russian students on a trip to the Tajga. Everybody got a horse, and early in the morning we rode out.

The morning air was sharply cold. The Tajga exhaled an intoxicating smell of resin, grass and rotten wood. The horses and the riders were wet through and through from the dew. Their silhouettes lost their contours and fused with a hazy background. In the diffused light the scenery lost its reality. We fell into the other world. The light and the shadow blended in fluently. We went through the grass, which was taller than a man on a horse, through endless birch forests and through bizarre loveliness of the swamp.

Suddenly we came out of the Tajga and a grandiose view opened before us. The rolling country covered by boundless forests was intersected by a river which slowly and fluently flowed meandering to the horizon.

It was daybreak. The ball of the sun lazily rose up. Its rays fondled the fabulous country.

A rare moment in life, in time. There were no problems, no questions. There was only man and the mystery of nature.

STORY OF DANGER

Daniel Krampera

This happened in the summer of 1989. It was possible only in Czechoslovakia. I and my girl-friend were spending a holiday in western Bohemia, near the city of Cheb.

I like summer evenings, at about eleven p.m., when the day is finished and dark is coming. It's a special time to go for a walk. My story starts with such a walk.

We were going to the wood, which is situated near the border region -- some twenty kilometres from the frontier with West Germany. When we were walking along the footpath,and talking about everything, I saw a car's lights. It is strange in the wood at eleven p.m. But I am too lazy to use my reasoning on a night walk. I didn't reflect on it, and we continued talking.

In the next moment I saw two soldiers. I said to my girl-friend: "Look at these poor boys, they have to wear a uniform on such a warm night; they have guns instead of a girl". But I discovered with surprise that they were waiting for us. One of them said: "Here they are", and both aimed their guns at us. I asked one of these soldiers: "What is the meaning of this, I didn't do anything bad". He answered only "hm" and shoved me away with his gun. I was walking with the unpleasant feeling of the gun behind my back.

After five minutes we came to the car. There were four guards waiting for us. Another four soldiers followed in our footprints with a dog. My girl-friend was very scared when she heard the dog. One of the soldiers around the car wanted to sound the alarm for another thirty soldiers. All in all forty soldiers had chased two lovers on a quiet walk.

All ended well. At first the soldiers wanted to give us a thrashing, but then they realized that they were needed somewhere else. Finally they took us back to our camp. All ended well.

THE MEETING IN THE FOREST

Kristína Juricová

"Kristína, please wait for me, I would like to give you an invitation for our week-end trip. This week-end. Have you any plans?" And because I had nothing planned for these days, and I accepted my friend Marek's suggestion, his words resulted in four unforgettable days for me.

Spending some days in the outdoors with good friends, playing games, enjoying the beautiful countryside -- although so near Prague -- it didn't mean anything new for me. I was used to eating our "trip" food -- only vegetables, fruits and cereals, to starve at the end (the food always disappeared so soon), sleeping with twelve other people in the little cottage.

"But have you ever heard about the times when the earth is crying?" We were surprised by this question of Peter's, although we knew about his activity in the ecological movement, about his effort to understand the Earth -- "our mother." Really, can the Earth cry? And why? I thought about it very hard while my friend was speaking: "This Thursday I was able to watch the sunset with my own eyes. Can you imagine? The great sun was leaving the sky, slowly, and I didn't have to shut my eyes, I could look at it directly ... through the Prague smog."

Each of us could continue but it wasn't possible in such a nice wood as we were in -- like in a fairy tale. Our mood was at zero when somebody planted fresh hope in our hearts: "But I know about the moments when the Earth is smiling and its smile is very, very nice ...." We are a group of curious fellows. That's why we decided to find out everything about the Earth and its problems.

Next day we did all the necessary work soon to be able to start our "search" action. We presumed that the voice of the Earth had to be very weak and quiet (in case it could speak with us) and so if we wanted to hear it, we had to go to meet it alone.

I chose the nearby wood with my eyes, took my flute, papers and

pencils for drawing, and I set out on my journey with great impatience. "Can I hear something? Isn't it only our figment or Peter's purpose? Don't I have a heart which is too tired by living in the big town?" Do you know the feeling when you, always so busy, meet a good friend, and only this meeting changes everything -- your temper, your face, the world, your program for the afternoon? All your problems run away.

I felt this feeling exactly when I entered the forest. I found a nice place -- an old tree lay on the grass -- I sat down here and then ... I heard some voices -- very gentle, weak, but real ones! White flowers around me! They were very jolly, kind to me, and asked me to make a portrait of them. "Of course I can," I answered, although my drawing abilities aren't so excellent. After a while a butterfly came and asked me to draw it too ... they were very glad to meet me and I was so full of good spirits, happiness, that I started to play the flute -- only for a while because the birds' singing was nicer.

I spent a very nice time in the company of beetles, butterflies, birds, flowers, young trees, and the old tree on the grass. Full of peace in my heart with myself and with a strong resolution to be as kind, open and sincere to the other people as my "wood" friends were to me. I came back to our cottage. I started to speak with the others and I couldn't understand why the love, sincerity and gratitude could be felt so strongly amongst us...

MY EXPERIMENTS

Ján Híves

It happened about ten years ago. We lived in our large flat at that time. We are a big family and so I lived with my younger brother, Paul, in one room. He was ten. My oldest sister, Mary, is a teacher at a Secondary Grammar School, and she teaches chemistry and physics. I often spent two weeks of my holiday at her laboratry at the school because I am interested in chemistry. Laboratory experiments interested me very much, and that is why I decided to make a small chemical laboratory in our room.

My younger brother, Paul, was not very enthusiastic about it. We got ready to go to sleep on Monday evening. We got in our pyjamas. That day I had made some experiments and I hadn't finished in time. I then decided to continue my day's work. I woke up and I prepared things. At about nine p.m. my mother came in our room to say good night to us. She asked me -- John, do you know where Paul is?-

- He is sleeping in his bed -- I quickly answered.

- I'm sorry, but he isn't here -- she told me.

- He visited the WC, maybe -- I answered annoyedly.

- O.K. I'll have a look there -- she told me.

I continued in my work. After some minutes mother came back and told me -Paul isn't in the WC, it's empty!

- Mum, sorry, I have to concentrate on my experiment. I haven't time to watch what Paul is doing.

- OK, OK, I'll have a look elsewhere -- she answered.

After half an hour she came back once more.
- I can't find him, please help me find him.

- I'm very sorry, mum, I can't do it now. You have to help yourself.

Then she looked under the bed and there she saw my sleeping brother. Mother woke him up and asked - Paul, what are you doing under the bed? Are you crazy? Why don't you sleep on the bed like a normal boy?

Paul answered - Mum, I would like to sleep like a normal boy, but John made some chemical experiments which I dreaded very much. Then I decided to sleep under the bed to save myself!

We laughed for a long time. Since then I have conducted all other experiments in the school's laboratory, not in our room.

A HAPPY MEMORY

Dana Amblerová

It was several years ao. I spent my holidays in the Tatras. We were a group of friends, we knew each other very well. Every day we went on very long trips in this beautiful part of our country. All our days were nice, but I remember especially one.

We set out early in the morning. The weather was very nice and we went through the dark green woods and light green mountain meadows. At noon we climbed up a hill, and we decided to have a picnic there. We were sitting together in the middle of the thousands of flowers, the sun was shining. The most beautiful scenery I had ever seen was around us. It looked like a picture from the catalogue of some travel agency: mountains, meadows in full bloom, flocks of sheep. We had a strong feeling of friendship, and I felt completely free and perfectly happy.

THE 5TH DECEMBER, 1989 IN KRKONOŠE

(The frontier mountains with Poland in north-east Bohemia)

Eva Čadová

My two girlfriends proposed making a trip to Krkonoše for a week-end. I gladly agreed.

We slept in an isolated cottage in a large meadow. The next day we wanted to go for a trip. In the morning we prepared breakfast, took our skis, and started skiing. The weather was fast becoming cloudy. At about eleven we got to the winter sports centre -- a small town, Pec pod Sněžkou. All of us were hungry, so we stopped at a new, modern snack-bar.

The chair-lift from Pec to Sněžka (the highest point in Krkonoše -- 1602 metres) was not working. We climbed up with our skis on our backs in the deep snow under the chair lift. At three p.m. we arrived at the top at last. It was windy and it was freezing. We refreshed ourselves at the top with cups of tea and continued on our trip to the Labská cabin. It grew dark, the wind became strong, and freezing, and it started to snow. We could hardly see the two or three stakes marking the way. What was more, we weren't sure we had chosen the right way.

In the end it caused a quarrel, and at last we decided it would be better to go back. We passed by a Polish frontier station at the bottom of the hill. When we rang the bell the soldiers were terrified. They gave us a lot of cups of tea and gave us a lot to eat. Our clothes had got wet, and we all had red blotches on our faces and hands. We were very happy at that moment. We were sitting in a warm kitchen.

But our luck didn't last too long because we were not allowed to say there because of the soldiers' orders. And it was impossible for us to go on climbing because of the weather.

But we were lucky at last. On the other side of the station there is a buffet for Polish tourists only. The manager of this buffet and his wife

invited us to their own flat and gave us a room to spend the night. It was very good of them. We were even allowed to watch a good film on Polish T.V. -- a film with Audrey Hepburn in the main role. What more could we have wished for? The wind behind the window raged on long into the night.

The next morning we bade farewell to our hosts and went back to the cottage. The morning was quiet and sunny, the sky without a cloud. During the night about a foot of powder snow had fallen throughout the area. We could see very clearly all the white hills, dark forests, tiny villages in the valleys. It was our most beautiful morning.

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PHOTO

Lubos Marek

The photo was taken by my father when I was four years old. My parents liked to go with me and my sister to ski at the small mountain village of Perning at Krušné Hory in northern Bohemia. My father always wanted to improve my ski skills but I wasn't so keen. I always wanted my toboggan. Once, when I cried a lot because I wanted the toboggan, my father took the photo. But then I became a big fan of skiing, and I was the one who forced all the family to go skiing. I began to ski with my friends, and either my sister or my parents always showed them the photo. This caused a lot of embarrassing situations, but every time I felt happy inside because of their encouragement and care.

MY FIRST DRUNK

Honza

When I was eight, I was in the Palova mountains in South Moravia with my parents and some members of our climbing club. My parents went rock climbing, and I ran around. When night time came everybody went to the wine cellar. There was an old butler. I asked my father to give me some money because I wanted to drink wine too. My father gave me a two-litre bottle and ten crowns and told me: "It is for a half litre of red wine, because one litre of red wine costs twenty crowns." Then I asked the butler to give me half a litre of red wine, and he asked me why "only a half litre. I answered that I had only ten crowns. But he said: "It doesn't matter, I'll give you a whole litre."

But because he was drunk he thought that my two-litre-bottle was a one-litre-bottle and filled it up. I, my sister, and our friend went to sit on a cemetery wall. There we sat and drank.

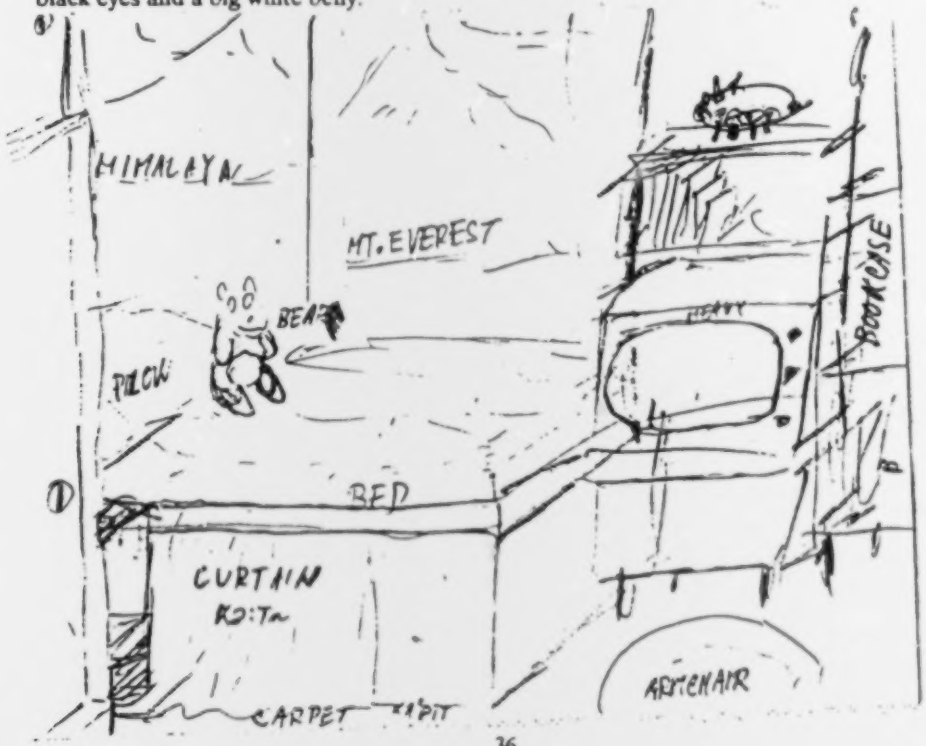
I drank about a litre of the wine, because girls are girls. I wanted to see how much I was drunk and then I tried to walk in a straight line. I thought I went in a straight line, but who knows? My mother, when she looked at me, worried that I would throw-up, and I wasn't allowed to sleep in the tent. I slept in a hay-stack.

In the morning I stood up, but I didn't throw-up. But I had swollen eyes because I was allergic to the hay.

MY FAVORITE PLACE

Honza

I like to sleep and dislike to stand-up. I don't know what my favorite place is, but I think that it is my bed. My bed is about a meter high. There are some posters around on the wall. There are rocks and mountains on the posters. There is a big, heavy, Russian TV in front of my bed. On top of the TV there is a glass piggybank. Beside my bed there is a stack of magazines. Under my bed I have so many things. These are my treasures. On my pillow sits my teddybear. It's my love. His name is Růžena, and I call him Růžena because I love him. It is pink with black eyes and a big white belly.



WAS HE A KILLER?

Dana

It was about one year ago. I was coming back from a small trip. It was fourteen kilometres from my home. There was no possibility of getting home, only by train which was due in two hours. So, I decided to try hitch-hiking. Up till then I was walking with another person, but not a friend.

I was waiting on the road. It was getting dark. I thought about my mum. She told me that one or two months before somebody killed a young girl near my home. She was hitch-hiking like me. But I didn't want to wait for a train. I took my small knife and put it into my pocket, to be sure.

After ten or fifteen minutes a light car stopped, a Škoda. There was only one man inside.

"Are you going to Rudnov?" I asked him, and hoped and hoped that I would hear no. I thought about this girl and was mad at myself, that only my small knife and I would not be powerful enough against him. He didn't look dangerous. He was probably fortyish, a normal man, a little bit fat, with receding hairline and a rather ordinary but not ugly face. But you never know.

"Yes, I am," answered he, and I had no chance, I sat in and closed the door. I didn't feel very good, but the worst moment was when the man asked me: "Aren't you afraid? Haven't you heard about this murder two months ago? This girl was hitch-hiking too."

"Yes, I have heard about it," I answered, and my hand was holding the knife inside my pocket. But it was unnecessary, for luckily he just started talking about something else.

Rudnov at last. I got out and said: "Thank you very much, good-bye." I like hitch-hiking, but I'll never go by myself another time.

MY DRIVER'S TEST

Lenka Vrtalová

It was three years ago when I took my driver's test. I wasn't able to drive a car. My instructor said: "It would be better to dig ditches than to get into a car with you!" He was right. Two weeks before the examination we had an accident and we ended up with our car upside down. It wasn't a very happy moment. When I took the test I was afraid of it, and I went down a one-way street the wrong way. My instructor wasn't surprised. But I did have to take the exam again. In the end -- for the third time -- I had to go down one simple street. The policeman was very kind. There was no crossing there, and no traffic sign either. We met no other cars there. The instructor said: "So, we'll let you pass the driving test, but you must promise us that you will marry a boy who is a good driver!"

PHILIP THE PARROT

Lenka Vrtalová

I would like to tell you something about our parrot, Philip -- he is in this picture. He is two years old, and he isn't an ordinary parrot. He speaks a lot -- he knows about fifty words (in Czech, of course). His cage is in the kitchen, and so my Mother has to listen to him all day long. Sometimes she says to him: "Don't talk so much! Be quiet! I have a headache because of you!"

And he repeats all that he hears. If anyone comes to see us, he comes right away and says to them: "Don't talk so much! Be quiet! I have a headache because of you!" Our guests are surprised, but he goes on: "Now you are naughty! Go to your cage! What do you want there?" (He heard us say these words and remembered them). But people can't be angry with Philip. He is a big comedian. Sometimes he says to our guests: "You are our nice parrot, lovely little parrot, you are a clever parrot ...." He loves himself very much.

ONE NIGHT IN MOSCOW

Monika Hlavínová

The year is 1987. August. My name is Monika. I am twenty years old and I am spending three weeks with my friends from the Technical Institute in Moscow. I enjoy walking alone, because I can see more things and get to know more people than when I am with the group. I love the Arbat. Arbat -- it means the young poets with burning eyes and wild gestures who their recite their own poems and get hoarse. It is the painter, who painted my portrait free of charge and so I gave him the rose which I got a few minutes before from somebody else. Arbat -- it is the dance and the sights and the songs.

And here I met young Russian hippies -- and Anja. I listened to their songs and talked with them for several hours, and then Anja said to me: "Go with me. We will change the place." And I went. We spoke about the life in my country and in her one. I found that one pair of shoes meant forty rubles and her income per month is 140 rubles, that she has a little boy, and she hasn't a husband, but her son is now with her sister. I was surprised when Anja told me that people don't believe Gorbachev's politics, and don't like him.

We went to the pub and I saw a long queue in front of us, but Anja made her way right to the door. She said something to the waiter and the door was opened. We sat with a very old Russian count at the table. He had only two teeth and I couldn't understand him very well. The other partner was a worker, thirty or forty years old. Anja ordered the dinner -- the shrimps with mayonnaise -- but only for me. (It is luxury food there). When I tried to stop her, she said nothing -- you are my guest. They were drinking the sour beer from the glass pitcher and we were speaking about everything. After two or three hours Anja said: "We need the change. Men, give me the money for Monika's dinner." I wanted to pay it, but it wasn't possible and the older man and the worker paid for my dinner. Anja and I left the pub.

We met a demonstration of punks and heavy metal kids with flags. I wanted to know why. Anja was afraid about me. They were coming from

the football match. It started raining. We took a taxi and went only about one kilometer to one of the best hotels in Moscow, the "Rosia," but I didn't know it yet. After leaving the taxi I was surprised by it.

We went inside. Anja said something to the waiter and instantly we had a table for four persons. After a few minutes we had the company of two men -- from Moscow. We talked a lot, danced, and in between times I had to eat a second dinner. (I didn't know it but again I was Anja's guest). I loved to dance all the time. The dancing in Moscow was strange for me. The men danced with men, the same with the women. Young, old, it didn't matter. Sometimes they would form a circle. Therefore, when we started the mixed dancing together the others seemed puzzled, but I thought that our friends were good dancers; besides, they were people with interesting thoughts. I knew that it is impossible for the regime to control people's thoughts. They paid my dinner by the same method as the friends from the pub.

Anja left us for a short time. I noticed that she was arguing with the waiter. He brought in a very ugly Arab. The Arab had all gold teeth. I overheard the waiter telling Anja that she was not allowed to come there again. We left our friends.

Anja told the Arab that they must go with me by taxi to the student residence because I am her guest. He didn't want to do it. He wanted to pay the taxi for me, and to go away with Anja. But Anja said that either we would go together with Monika or he would be without her. So they went with me.

I was very unhappy for Anjo, for the regime which forces mothers into becoming prostitutes. I fell asleep in the taxi but I felt how the Arab embraced Anja, and how abominable it was for her, but I didn't know how I could help her. I'd never met with that life. I knew that in Prague it is possible too, but it is only for extra money, it is not through need. Anja is an unusual person.

Every minute of that strange night was a surprise for me. When Anja and I parted I cried.

MY FIRST MEMORY

Libor Novotný

When I was one year and nine months I remember Christmas in our new flat. This is the first memory I remember.

I was alone in the room and I was standing in my children's bed. It was a bed with bars and I couldn't get out. Near my bed was a Christmas tree with pieces of chocolate. I wanted to reach a piece of chocolate but it was too far for my short arms. I was trying and trying and trying.

My mummy was in the living room with my daddy, and they were watching T.V. Only after the film had finished mummy came to look at me. She understood what I wanted and took me in her arms. Only this time I was allowed to choose my first Christmas piece of chocolate myself.

There is one interesting point in this story. I was so obsessed with my idea -- reaching for a piece of chocolate -- that I forgot to call mummy to give it to me.

MY FAVOURITE PLACE

Jarmila Brunckova

My favourite place is the city where I was born and where I spent my childhood. The name of this town is Bojnice.

Bojnice is situated in the centre of Slovakia, on the hill, between two mountains -- "Magura" in the north-west and "Utacnik" in the south-east. It is a small town with a population of about eight thousand people, and it is a famous tourist centre.

If you could come to Bojnice, firstly you'd have to visit the castle. It is the most conspicuous building in the city. The castle was built in the thirteenth century, burnt down two times, and given its present face in 1899-1909 by Earl Palfy, who was the last owner. The nicest room from this period is the "Golden Hall," because the ceiling is gold, and in the centre of it is the portrait of the last owner. This room was the most exquisite part of the castle. A very interesting fact is that Mr. Bata had his shoe stores here during the second world war.

The castle has been open for visitors since 1969. I like this place very much. When I was younger I visited it every year; I knew the whole castle with my eyes closed.

Next you can go for a walk in the garden around the castle. There is a small lake in the centre of which there is a small "prison." Everything is small but interesting and nice. Only the Zoo Garden near this place is large. There are exotic animals there.

If you have any problems with your internal organs you can visit the baths in the town. The water from the springs is hot, and you can see the goldfish in the river in the winter as well.

If you don't want to walk too much you can buy a ticket at the swimming baths and spend your time in the water. Or You can visit an amphitheatre or a restaurant under the open sky.

I have happy memories connected to this place. I got married in the "Golden Hall" of Bojnice's castle. It was the last nice day -- very hot -- in the summer of 1988. The next day it rained.

FEELING OF DANGER

Milan Bruncko

This story happened to me three years ago.

I swam in the lake about five hundred metres away from shore. The water was seventeen degrees centrigrade. When I wanted to swim back to shore, a strong wind started to blow against me.

It was a terrible situation because I wasn't able to reach the shore.

Finally, after thirty minutes, I successfully reached the shore, totally exhausted. Pretty scary -- a really strong wind can make swimming very difficult.

MY FIRST SWIMMING LESSON

Vít Sova

When I was a very little boy, I attended the first grade of basic school. I wanted to swim very much. Therefore my father took me to a swimming lesson. I was looking forward to it very much.

When I got near the swimming pool there was a very tall grey man standing there, and he had a very long wooden stick. At this time I still did not know what waited for me.

Then it started. I was drowning and the grey man poked me with the pole in my hip. My first experience was very bad. I do not like to remember it.

LIFE STORY

Blanka Beránková

I chose the picture where my Mother, my sister and one monkey can be seen. My Father took this picture in Algeria. We were there on a visit with my aunt and uncle, also my cousins. Once we went with them to see a monkey valley. We bought a lot of biscuits and candies for them. But we couldn't find any there. Maybe they were tired or they slept. On the way back we stopped at a parking place to take a rest, and finally we saw about five monkeys. We gave them sweets. Daddy wanted to photograph us with one of them. We stood near the monkey and the monkey touched my sister. She was surprised and jumped away from the monkey. She pushed my mother. Mummy changed her place, and that's why I am not seen in the snap, because I am behind my Mother.

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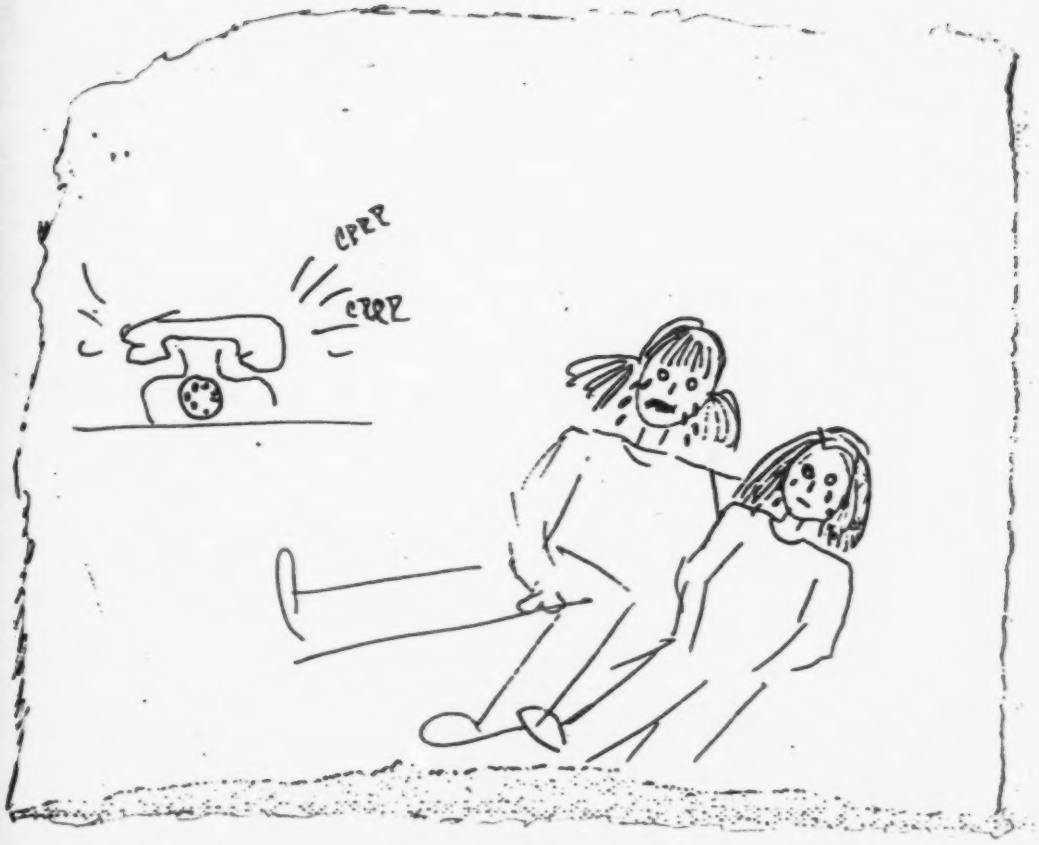
THE PHONE CALL

Blanka Beránková

My Mother was at our cottage with my brother who was very small. We, me and my sister Jitka, stayed at home alone with my father. I was thirteen and she was twelve. We were waiting for Daddy. The phone rang. Jitka answered and somebody told her that our father was dead.

We started to cry. I went downstairs to our neighbours. I told them what had happened. He said that it could not be true and called the police office to ask if they knew something about it -- about an accident. Jitka and I sat on the floor crying.

Then again the phone rang. I answered it. It was Daddy, alive! I couldn't believe it. We were overjoyed. I think it was the hardest hour of my life. I was too scared to answer phones after that. We never found out who had done it.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A NIGHT GUEST

Martina Hammerbauerova

Two years ago I was in the Romanian mountains at the end of the holidays. The second night we decided to sleep in a small meadow in the forest, not far away from a spring. We were three, two girls and one boy. We had sleeping bags and one very small tent. Lenka and Pavel wanted to sleep outdoors and I was to sleep in the tent with our rucksacks and food for two weeks. But in the end we all slept in the tent and we leant our rucksacks against it.

We had been sleeping for a couple of hours when suddenly we woke up, thanks to some very strange sounds. We heard the tearing of cloth, and clacking of the tongue. We looked out of our tent and we saw pieces of food, cloth and plastic. And on the edge of the forest, about ten metres from our tent, was a big moving shadow. It had to be a bear. We returned and tried to sleep but I couldn't because we could still hear the sounds of an animal eating dinner.

In the morning we could see all the damage our night guest had done. It had destroyed our rucksacks, eaten our bread, sugar, salami, soups -- everything except for tins, chocolate and coffee. We repaired our rucksacks the next day. I was very happy I hadn't slept alone with our food in the tent.

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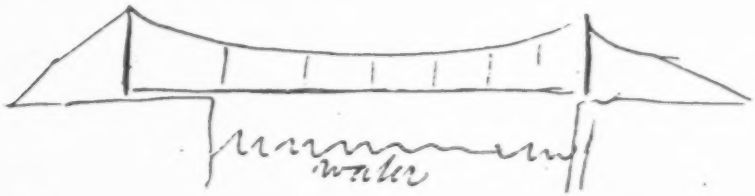
A HAPPY MEMORY

Martina Hammerbauerova

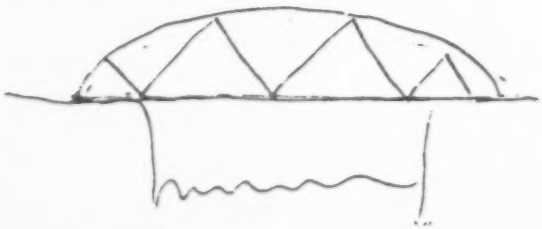
Last week I took part in the annual student action -- Bohatyrska trilogie. Each school (university) has their own group and their own procedure; they ride a bike, some days they hike, and some days they do canoeing. But they all finish together.

It was at the week-end, and we had a great competition. We had to wake up at three a.m. and this competition finished at three p.m. Every group got a map; there were about twelve points, controls, where we did different exercises during a maximum of one hour. We were able to choose where to start, because it was impossible to do everything in time. For example, we had to bring a flame (a candle) from a distance of about two kilometres, or to fill a jar with water using only spoons, and these spoons had to be two metres above the jar.

The most interesting exercise was building a bridge. We had only a rope and one hundred sticks -- thirty centimetre wooden sticks. And the bridge had to be built over a brook three metres wide. At first we wanted to build this type of bridge:



But Peter had a different idea, he wanted this type:



He said that it would be very fast to build. Nobody believed him, but we tried it anyway, because none of us had ever built such a kind.

I was very surprised, when we'd finished working, to find that this bridge was very fast indeed.

A MISCELLANY OF FIRST RECOLLECTIONS

The following short anecdotes are the result of impromptu story-telling episodes in the class, some of them using snapshots, drawings, or other "triggers" to generate ideas. While they record the same sorts of experiences as in the previous stories, these are merely the first recollections of events. With more time for expansion, development, and revision these could become more polished stories.

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MY FIRST DANCE LESSON

I very much looked forward to my first dance lesson. My mother bought me a nice dress and we went to the dancing lesson. There were many boys and girls everywhere. Our dance master asked the boys to dance, and a tall boy came for me. We started to dance what we had learnt. But then we suddenly started dancing very quickly. The floor was very slippery, and I fell over on the floor. It was very shameful because all the boys and girls laughed at me.

****

DRUNK

This story happened on New Year's Eve, 1985. After midnight I with my two friends went into the forest with a bottle of fruit wine. One of us had a few cheap cigarettes, "Mars," although we weren't smokers. The weather was very cold and the energy from the oxidation of alcohol was not enough. I lit a cigarette. I was sick and I had a headache. When I came home mother asked me: "Did you smoke?" It was impossible to lie. I said: "Yes, the cigarette saved my body!"

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END-OF-SCHOOL PARTY

In my picture there is a week-end house in front of the woods, and my schoolmates around the week-end house. The photo was taken five years ago. We were in the week-end house after taking our final examination at the grammar school. We spent a very nice week there. The week-end house was built near the small village of Breziny in the Czech-Moravian highlands. There is a very nice landscape. We went for a hike every day. We went to the very small villlage of Gamotin; there are only three houses. One of them is a small, private pub. Its proprietor there prepared and sold a special alcoholic herbal drink called *vanek*. We also climbed up the nearby rocks.

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HOLIDAY VISIT

This is a picture of my last holiday. We visited a beautiful town, Telc, with my girlfriend. In this town there is a small, old castle. In the picture there is a garden castle. There are a lot of very nice trees and flowers. There is also a gallery in this castle. There we saw an exposition of our well known artist, Jan Saravý.

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SNAPSHOT

This photo was taken in November last year. My friend, Jarka, bought some shaving cream for her friend this day, and we decided to shave her. This scene was only for the photo. We didn't really shave her. I took this photo and Jarka went to have a bath. We were in a very funny mood. It's the normal thing to do when we have to study for exams. We learnt organic chemistry this evening, I think!

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AIRPORT

This is a picture of my husband and me. It is at the Frankfurt airport. We were there last summer. We visited our relations. This picture was taken by our uncle. He told us that every minute one plane took off and another plane landed. I didn't believe him and that is why he took us there. It was true, I saw it with my own eyes. This airport ranks among the largest ones in Europe. It is like a small town. There are many shops there and also all services. You can, for example, buy a new car there. This picture is important to me because I have good memories of our holiday, travelling.

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CYCLING IN AMSTERDAM

This story happened in September last year. I was in Amsterdam and I was to go by bike through the city with my Dutch friend. It was horrible because Dutch people, when they go by bike, don't mind cars, lights or crossings. The only thing they look out for are taxis, nothing else. My friend went too fast for me, and the only thing I knew was that I didn't know the way, and I couldn't lose Sienard -- this is my friend's name. I'm not used to going by bike in such heavy traffic.

That's it.

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HORSERIDING

This is a picture of my horse, which I am riding. The photo was taken by me about two years ago. This is a mare called Flora, and now she's seven years old. Although she looks very good and mild, she has a bad character; often she kicks and bites. But I love her very much and wouldn't change her.

Horseback riding is my favourite hobby even though I have had a few accidents. I have been interested in it for a long time -- I think all my life. I go to a village near the town where I live, and there is our horseback riding sports club. It isn't too large. We have fifteen horses, and about twenty people ride them. This hobby requires a lot of time because we have to look after the horses on Saturdays and Sundays. I'm sorry that now I'm living in Prague at the kolej (students'residence), I have little time for my mare.

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CARNIVAL

This photograph shows me five years ago at the holiday children's camp. This camp was near the town of Sázava on the river Sázava. It is one hundred kilometres from Prague.

My friend took this photograph when we had the children's carnival. I was in the carnival dressed like a charwoman. On my head I had a wig and a duster. In my hand there is a broom and a dustpan.

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MOTORBIKE TRIALS

This picture shows me on my Montesa motorcycle in a race in 1987. This even is called a TRIAL.

The photo was taken by my father. It was near Prague, in the small town of Cesovice.

This photo is important for me because it reminds me of my last success in this sport. I was second in this race. Now I will have to give up this sport because I don't have the free time for training, and this sport is too expensive.

This picture is interesting because I did not fall.

****

MY FIRST CAMEL

This is a picture of Buzhara. This is a town in central Asia. It shows an important monument where we met our first camel. The photo was taken by my friend, Kamal. I was on holiday there. It is important for me because it was the first time I saw a camel in a town. The people in the picture are my girlfriend, Petra, and me.

****

STUCK UNDER THE WARDROBE

One day, when I was a little child, I was playing with my ball. But suddenly the ball rolled under the wardrobe. I tried to get the ball out but I couldn't reach it. So I got under the wardrobe, I got the ball, but I couldn't get my head out. I was stuck. I was very scared. My sister had to call my father and then he lifted the wardrobe and I was free.

****

STUCK IN THE ELEVATOR

I went from the apartment on the l9th floor to a lunch meeting with my father. I used an elevator. And suddenly the lift broke down. I must say I am always scared of lifts and closed rooms. I rang the bell, but nothing happened. I missed the meeting with daddy. Daddy went home the way I go.. He came home, but there was nobody in the apartment, and suddenly he heard somebody ring the bell, somebody needing help. He phone the maintenance office. They called for the serviceman. The serviceman pulled up the lift with me in it, and opened the lift and got me free. I had been in the lift for three hours. It was my worst experience with lifts.

****

SCARED IN THE STREETS

It took place at Mala Strana this winter when I was coming home from the ball. I was alone because I hadn't watched my boyfriend very well, and he got drunk there. It was in the night, or, more exactly, early in the morning. I walked through the streets and lanes, and also through one park, and the only thing I was frightened of, and also the worst one, was the quietness and darkness of the empty streets without any sounds and noises. I was very frightened and I was really very happy when I reached our house gate. The next time my unreliable friend gets drunk at a ball I'll take a taxi.

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

An unforgettable place for me is Lipnice, a small village near the Sárava River. In Lipnice around the flooded quarry lies the Holiday School -- a camp for young people (secondary or high school students or young working people) who like to find out about how they behave in unexpected and complicated situations.

Lipnice is an unusual place where a person does things he wouldn't normally do in another place,or in his normal life. There are very good and experienced instructors, though not too old, and they know how to create such an atmosphere, which makes it possible. There we played many interesting, and sometimes very exciting, psychological games, and took part in hard races; we didn't know what it was to take a rest. Several times I felt totally exhausted. But I learned many useful things, and I observed the other person in my body.

Since then I've been to many unusual camps and I have also organized some of them. But Lipnice was But Lipnice was the first, and meant a great change in my life.

MEMORY OF MY CHILDHOOD

I went shopping with my mother. While she was shopping I was playing with other children in the park in front of the shop. We climbed up the tree. I suddenly got my head stuck between two branches which were very close to each other. I was very frightened because my neck was painful. I cried and a lot of people came quickly, including my mother. One man took my head and moved the branches aside. My mother was angry, and she punished me for my "playing". But my neck hurt for almost two weeks.

****

MEMORIES OF CAMP

It was in south Bohemia several years ago. We were a group of twenty young people, and we were spending our holiday together. We worked in the forest, and also we played games. But we didn't know each other before, and so we couldn't remember each other's names.

And now about the photo. There I am with my friend Deps. He had forgotten my name. At that moment I said: "Fall down to your knees, my dear!" So the poor boy had to kneel, reach up to the sky many times, and to the earth, and exclaim; "Excuse me, my God". He had to do it as long as I wanted.

I chose this photo because I like to remember these summer days, the country, and the group of people. I have never seen them again, and so I have forgotten who took this photo.

****

END

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